



Introduction

The biggest problem with grammar books is they are geared to young students who dream of the Great American Novel.

These students want to learn the secrets of how to write well. They explore prose and poetry that sings. They marvel at the literary devices of Moby Dick. They study how to build magical metaphors to send hidden messages that once cracked, thrill readers and English professors. They are excited to learn the significance of the Mississippi in Huckleberry Finn.

People who write for business pursue different goals. They want to communicate to their bosses or their employees or their customers. They aim to convey clear and concise messages for something as simple as emails or meaty as a five-page proposal to convince people of their viewpoints. They need to know what works. I witnessed an investment committee decide to invest \$500 million because of a 750-word paper written by two portfolio managers at PIMCO, one of the world's largest bond funds and where I worked for a few months.

When writing for business, ambiguity is the enemy. Metaphors, soliloquies and grammatical errors are to be found and shot.

People who are thrust into business may suddenly realize they are making mistakes in their emails to bosses or employees.

Ever wonder why knowing the difference between the use of good and well is the sign of an educated person? Ever confuse their with there? How about it's with its? Don't understand the verb-subject agreement? And maybe you never heard of parallelism? Ever hear someone snicker if you say "irregardless"?

These errors may cause others to wonder if we are as smart as we all pretend to be. Someone may be snotty behind our backs, saying we are splitting the infinitive! We might wonder if we got passed over for promotions because of grammatical mistakes in our messages. Ever grimace about the boss who sends a message full of grammatical mistakes? The surest way to look dumb is to write poorly.

If you think you write good, this book is for you. If you didn't understand the irony in the previous sentence, this book really is for you!

This book is for people in business or the government who don't love grammar, but realize their path to success is to write well enough and avoid those silly errors that it seems like everyone else knows.

How many were day dreaming in 10th grade when our old fuddy-duddy English teachers taught the verb-subject agreement? I know I was. In college, all of us picked up bad habits such as the student parlor trick of stretching a 500-word essay into 2,000 words.

So, what are we to do?

You can brush up on your grammar, but trying to pick the right book on Amazon is daunting. And too many of the books aren't targeted toward business. Many of you don't have the time to slog through a thick book on grammar and would be bored stiff if you do.

Who has the time for a 10-week refresher course taught by someone who would rather be writing the great American novel? You can hire your own personal editor (I am available!), but it is on the expensive side.

Presto – “How to Write at Work” is a short primer to help you. This book will teach readers how to sharpen their English skills in 11 chapters that range from how to begin in Chapter 1 to verb tenses to parallelism in Chapter 4 to headlines in chapter 9. The final chapter is a list of hard-earned techniques learned throughout the years by professional editors and writers.

This book doesn't cover every single grammatical issue. There are other books up to 600 pages thick that explain in excruciating detail the guidelines to prepositional phrases or subjunctive clauses. I read many grammatical books of such length for both my professional career and to make sure I didn't miss something significant in this book.

This book will teach executives the subtle techniques employed by journalists to improve their writing. It's a quick read something to have on your desk for reference. A workbook provides examples on how to handle the variety of issues discussed in this book.

Why me above all your other choices?

With 35 years in journalism, I've written more than 30,000 articles. The world's most prestigious publications like The New York Times and The Washington Post have published my articles, which have appeared in newspapers in China, Australia, Germany, Canada, Mexico and Singapore. On Wall Street, I've written headlines and articles that have moved the market capitalization of publicly traded companies by hundreds of millions of dollars.

I've learned techniques that you can also employ to improve your writing skills. These skills won't win you a Pulitzer Prize, but they will permit a bigger award: the ability to communicate.

I want to share a secret as well. The editors during my career would be shocked to read that I am writing a book that includes grammar. I'm not the best at this subject. I

was the journalist who got the scoops and told great stories. I left the technical boring grammar stuff to editors to straighten out. Grammar was too hard, had too many exceptions and didn't make much sense.

Besides, that is what editors are for – to fix any errors in my copy. I grew up in Hawaii speakin' da kine pidgin, a broken-down English where anything went. It took years of editors scolding me about common errors that you will learn in this book. I know I missed a few pay raises and perhaps job offers because of this issue.

This book is written from the viewpoint of someone who is not the very best in the field of grammar, but who has learned to appreciate its many nuances and flexibility and to love the editors who improve my writing. After years of publishing articles, I can pinpoint the top mistakes when writing.

I've learned from the best, including Matthew Winkler, founder of Bloomberg News, and Emma Moody, one of my former bosses and as of this writing one of the most important editors at The Wall Street Journal. My journalism professor Lynn Ludlow worked at the San Francisco Examiner where he taught reporting to the grandchildren of William Randolph Hearst. I spent a decade in Latin America, where my articles were carefully checked by a wonderful editor, Dery Dyer, owner of The Tico Times, the most famous newspaper in Central America. My editor at the Orange County Business Journal, Rick Reiff, is a Pulitzer Prize winner who helped edit this book.

The book is divided into 11 short chapters that each will take less than 15 minutes to read.

Chapter 10 includes a 65-point checklist for your writing. It has professional tips spread throughout the book; they are also repeated in Chapter 11.

You don't have to master every single professional tip. But if you learn some of the 65 points on checklist and professional tips, you are on your way to writing well.

You can reach me on LinkedIn where I blog -- feel free to leave comments! I occasionally teach webinars and at corporate offices.

After 11 lessons, spread out over two weeks, your writing will improve. It certainly won't get worse. I guarantee it. Or your money back.

